



Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. Floor Remarks February 10, 2011

Mr. Speaker, there is no higher sacrifice in our nation than military service. Our men and women in uniform serve honorably, whether they are stationed at a base here in the United States or serving in a combat zone far from home.

Some join the military out of patriotism. Some join in order to see the world. But for many, those motivations are coupled with another factor: the lack of jobs in our communities.

Facing shaky prospects, many young people turn to military service as an honorable, good-paying career.

But too many veterans end up unemployed when they leave the military. After dodging bullets on the battlefield, they find themselves jobless in the marketplace.

In the last few weeks, I've issued a call for unemployed Americans to send me their resumes at resumesforamerica@mail.house.gov so that I can enter their stories into the record as a way of dramatizing our unemployment problem. I've heard from thousands of Americans - including a number of veterans - who are struggling under the weight of unemployment.

Mushi Israel of San Diego, California is a Navy veteran who served for twenty years. He's an information technology specialist who has been out of work for an entire year.

As Mr. Israel said, "There are a lot of great people who are out of work like myself who believe in the American dream and society and just want to do an honest days work for an honest days pay."

David Reinke of Burbank, California was an Army Lieutenant who received an honorable discharge in 1980. Although Lieutenant Reinke said in an email to me that his service was "brief and undistinguished," I beg to differ. Anybody who puts on a uniform is distinguished and has the right to a good life here in America.

David worked for an event staging company for over twenty years. As he put it, "Unfortunately the economic downturn forced our company to lay off over 50 percent of the staff in an attempt to remain economically viable. I was one of those casualties."

So after serving our country, Lieutenant Reinke became an economic casualty. He lost his job in January of 2010, and has been substitute teaching when he can to make ends meet.

Andy Lang, a retired disabled Veteran from Snow Hill, North Carolina who has also been out of work since last January wrote, "You don't know how scared I am! Somedays I don't eat! Americans NEED help NOW!"

Ms. Harmony Leonard of Bradford, Pennsylvania wrote to me. She served in the U.S. Navy from 1975 to 1979, and was honorably discharged. Ms. Leonard has worked as a teacher, a grant coordinator, a development officer and a general manager of a restaurant. She was active in her community and said, "I did everything I could to be a vital part of my community and now that I have accumulated experience and education I seem to be invisible and of little use to society."

She continues, "My saving grace is that I am a veteran so I have medical care should I need it. And I am not starving because my partner is working in the natural gas industry. But what about me? What about my self esteem? What about the stigma attached to not working?"

Mr. Speaker, there's not a member of this body who has a good answer to Ms. Leonard. How can we look our veterans in the eye, thank them for their service, and tell them they are fresh out of luck when it comes to finding a job? How can we let them down like that?

I want to hear more stories like this - because I know they are out there. I know there are more

veterans who have served our country with honor and dignity, and now find themselves unemployed.

So, I'm calling on unemployed and underemployed veterans to send me your resume and your story to resumesfromveterans@mail.house.gov.

I'll submit them for the Congressional Record so that the unemployment problem among our veterans can be put front and center before our government.

Sending me your resume will not get you a job. But it can help force Washington to end unemployment once and for all.

Again, veterans and service members can send their resumes for the Record to resumesfromveterans@mail.house.gov.

Mr. Speaker, service to our nation is an honorable profession. And we should honor that service by seeing to it that every veteran has a job when their service is over. When you risk your life for our country, we should make sure you have a life when you return. No veteran should be left questioning how they will feed their family, wondering about their self worth, or fretting about their financial future.

It's time we did something to end unemployment once and for all for everybody, especially for our veterans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.